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SUBJECT: TIBET: RELIGION MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS EXPLAIN THEIR SYSTEM

REF: A. A) 07 CHENGDU 298; B) 08 CHENGDU 43; C) CHENGDU 248;
D) CHENGDU 251; E) 08 CHENGDU 39;

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¶11. (U) This cable contains sensitive but unclassified information and is not for internet distribution.

¶12. (SBU) Summary: The Tibetan Autonomous Region's (TAR) Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau recently presented to Consul General in Lhasa the strictly Chinese government, official view of: the TAR's ethnic and religious composition, and regulation of religious affairs, including the permissions process for becoming a monk; the work of monastery democratic management committees and government working groups that do "patriotic education" work in the monasteries; the Panchen Lama controversy; and strong government support for the rebuilding monasteries damaged during the Cultural Revolution. Gedun Cheokyi Nyima, the young Tibetan "illegally recognized" as the Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama, is well. End Summary.

Ethnic Tibetans 95 Percent of TAR's 2.83 Million Population

¶13. (SBU) TAR Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau Deputy Director Ngapo Jinyuan briefed Consul General October 20 in Lhasa on the ethnic situation of the TAR. Although the 1959 rebellion and the Cultural Revolution created much chaos in the region, Ngapo Jinyuan said, people today follow the maxims of the "Three Inseparables": Han Chinese cannot be separate from the minority peoples; the minority peoples cannot be separate from the Han Chinese; and the minorities cannot be separate from each other.

¶14. (SBU) Ngapo Jinyuan said that ethnic Tibetans comprise 95 percent of the 2.83 million population of the TAR. The populations of the Lhopa and Monpa minorities are about 10,000 each. The ethnic regional autonomy system conferred rights on the peoples of the TAR, and thus the "Tibetans became masters in their own house in 1959," Ngapo Jinyuan asserted. The TAR was established in 1965, but the "Law on Ethnic Regional Autonomy" was not passed until 1984. [Comment and Note: This official's "95 percent ethnic Tibetans" is highly misleading because it does not include the PLA soldiers and PAP police, the "Help Tibet" officials from inland China, and the many hundreds of thousands of migrants ethnic Han migrant workers to the TAR, who stay for months or years at a time (refs A and B). End

Comment.]

Rebuilt Monasteries

¶ 15. (SBU) Since 1979, the Chinese central government has invested nearly one billion RMB in the reconstruction of temples and other religious sites, Ngapo Jinyuan explained. Although much money is still needed for economic development, the government continues to make large investments in the protection of religious sites. People are free to practice their religion, but "illegal" and "separatist" activities are not allowed, he asserted.

¶ 16. (SBU) As we had heard in meetings with Vice Governor Wu and with the United Front Department (refs C and D) the right of people in the TAR to religious freedom was stressed. Ngapo Jinyuan said that there are four Tibetan Buddhist schools with 1700 religious venues and 46,000 monks and nuns in the TAR. There are four mosques with 4000 Tibetan Muslims and one Catholic Church with 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. All monasteries conduct normal religious activities. Many monasteries were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution but after 1978, most of them were rebuilt and the celebration of over 40 religious festivals has resumed.

¶ 17. (SBU) The tradition of identifying reincarnated lamas has been resumed, Ngapo Jinyuan said. The 11th Panchen Lama was

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indentified around 1992. Since the 1980s, the government has recognized the identification of 40 reincarnated lamas in the TAR.

Process of Applying and Being Approved as a Monk

¶ 18. (SBU) In response to a question from CG, Ngapo Jinyuan explained that if someone wants to become a monk or nun, they need to get permission from their parents, then communicate their intention to the county government, and then get permission from their prospective monastery or nunnery. The monastery or nunnery will test the candidate and put them on the religious candidates list for two years. During those two years, if they respect the rules and regulations of the Democratic Management Committee (DMC), then the candidate can become a monk or nun. In principle, the Communist Party of China gives people the freedom to practice their religion. However, in practice, some monasteries do not have the economic and intellectual capacity to accommodate many monks.

¶ 19. (SBU) The number of monks in a monastery depends upon how many monks the monastery can support and train, Ngapo Jinyuan asserted. The labor of monks is lost to their village, but many families feel that a monk in the family brings them glory. Children are not allowed to become a monk or a nun before they complete their nine years of compulsory education. Formerly, monks from outside the TAR could study in TAR monasteries without getting special permission, but now they need the permission of both their local government, and the TAR

government, in order to do so.

DMCs and Government Working Groups at Monasteries

¶10. (SBU) In response CG's question, Ngapo Jinyuan said that the DMC is different from the "government working group." The DMC is responsible for monastic religious affairs and financial management. All the monasteries have DMCs, and all of its members are monks. [Note: At the Gandan Monastery outside of Lhasa, the DMC director said that the Gandan DMC has 22 members: eleven monks and eleven government officials. The 11 government officials do not participate however in some of the decisions about the internal management of the monastery. End Note.]

¶11. (SBU) By contrast, the "government working group" is not stationed at all monasteries, Ngapo Jinyuan explained. These government working groups have been carrying out patriotic and legal education in the monasteries since 1994. The "government working group" doesn't plan to leave the monasteries any time soon. China is building a society under the rule of law and therefore the government working group needs to carry out legal education in the monasteries and nunneries so that monks and nuns will understand and respect the government's laws, he said.

Response to Question on Dalai Lama-Recognized Panchen Lama

¶12. (SBU) In response to CG's question about the whereabouts and well-being of the Gedun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama-recognized Panchen Lama, Ngapo Jinyuan said that he is a young Tibetan man who was "illegally identified" as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama. The young man is "growing up very well, loves Chinese culture and is enjoying his life." The Dalai Lama's illegal recognition of the Panchen Lama violated a 200-year tradition of central government recognition of Panchen Lamas, Ngapo Jinyuan asserted.

¶13. (SBU) In response to CG's questions on religious minorities
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and arrested monks, Ngapo Jinyuan stated:

-- There are about 400 Tibetan Muslims holding TAR ID cards in the region. These people were originally from India, Ladakh and Kashmir. Some of them settled in Gansu, Shanxi or Qinghai Provinces before coming to the TAR.

-- About 20 people from the TAR make the pilgrimage to Mecca each year. The TAR government organizes the trip, and reports the names of the pilgrims to the government of Saudi Arabia.

-- There are no Protestant Christians holding TAR ID cards. Therefore, there are no plans to open any protestant churches.

-- CG should ask the Justice Bureau about arrested monks. The TAR Government held a press conference about people who had been arrested after March 14, so "You can look it up."

-- There has been no change in China's religious policy since

March 14, 2008.
BROWN